



# Wyoming Game and Fish Department

## Jackson Region

### March 2016 Newsletter



Two bighorn ewes are ferried to biologists waiting on the ground.

### Bighorn Sheep Surveillance

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department is continuing its multi-year research project on bighorn sheep in the Jackson Region. In March, 14 female bighorn sheep were captured for disease sampling and fitted with radio collars to learn more about their survival, migration patterns and the potential presence of disease. Samples were collected to test for respiratory pathogens that can cause pneumonia. In addition, researchers from the Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit performed an ultrasound on each animal to determine pregnancy and measure body fat. This is part of a three-year study evaluating how body condition is related to pneumonia outbreaks. Since 2011, a total of 41 bighorn ewes have been collared with 30 of those currently still alive.

The Jackson herd, which typically numbers approximately 500 animals, has experienced two significant die-offs in recent years. In 2002, it was estimated that as many as 50 percent was lost due to a pneumonia outbreak and another estimated 30 percent lost again in 2012. It is estimated that the herd has climbed back to around 400 animals currently. Other bighorn sheep herds across the Rocky Mountains have also experienced significant declines in population due to pneumonia in recent years.



Jackson Wildlife Biologist Aly Courtemanch fits a GPS collar on a ewe.



Dr. Kevin Monteith of the WY Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Unit performs an ultrasound for pregnancy.



Jerod Merkle of the WY Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Unit and Jackson Game Warden Kyle Lash release a bighorn ewe





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## Tracking Elk

This month, biologists from the Game and Fish teamed up with National Elk Refuge personnel to chemically immobilize 27 cow elk on the National Elk Refuge.

The elk were darted, checked for pregnancy and fitted with Vaginal Implant Transmitters (VITs) to determine where animals have their calves. The elk also were fitted with GPS tracking collars to further define their seasonal movements. Blood samples also were collected to contribute to a long term database looking at brucellosis prevalence in elk.

In all, a total of 557 elk were handled by Game and Fish brucellosis biologists in both the Jackson and Pinedale regions this winter. This included capturing 498 animals in corral traps at Greys (Alpine), Dell, Fish, Scab and Muddy Creek feedgrounds. An additional 59 elk were darted on other state feedgrounds and the National Elk Refuge. A total of 48 GPS collars and 17 VITs were deployed and 334 blood samples were collected for brucellosis testing, which is currently being done at the Wyoming Game & Fish Vet Lab in Laramie.







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## Black Bear Recaptured

Afton Game Warden Todd Graham and Thayne Wildlife Biologist Gary Fralick assisted biologists Dan Bjorlie and Clint Atkinson with the replacing of a failed GPS collar on a black bear at its den site in the Greys River drainage. The full day excursion started with a 36-mile snowmobile ride, followed by a three-hour snowshoe hike in steep terrain just to get to the den site. It took nearly an hour to find the bear den using radio-telemetry. The bear was sedated in the den and the old GPS collar was replaced; all while the bear remained curled up in his den.



Information from this collar and collars on other black bears in the Greys River area will help inform Department efforts to estimate population abundance and density in the area as well as provide information for an ongoing mule deer ecology study being conducted by the University of Wyoming. This coming summer, the real work will begin as barbed wire hair corrals will be set up to collect samples for a DNA population estimation effort. Data gathered from this work will help the Department assess the status of the black bear population and evaluate current management strategies.



Don't forget to put in for the Super Tag raffle!

**Super Tag** - One winner for each of nine species – Tickets \$10 each.

**Super Tag Trifecta** - One winner chooses from any three species offered - Tickets \$30 each.

Raffle includes Wyoming's premier big game and trophy game species: bighorn sheep, moose, elk, mountain goat, mule deer or white-tailed deer, wild bison, antelope, mountain lion and black bear.



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## Catch of the Day

Jackson Lake fishing started picking up toward the end of February with some nice lake trout coming through the ice. Several fish between five and 10 pounds were caught. In addition to lake trout, anglers have been catching both cutthroat and brown trout, which is relatively uncommon for February.

Fish managers have been conducting creel surveys on Jackson Lake and report a catch rate of about .6 fish per hour. On average, managers like to see a catch rate of .5 fish per hour for ice anglers. Last year, the catch rate bumped up to .74 trout per hour in March, so now is a good time to go fishing.

So far, the ice is still good, but anglers should be cautious.

*A successful young ice angler out for a day with dad on Jackson Lake in Grand Teton NP.*



## FIVE ICE TIPS

### 1. CHECK THICKNESS

Contact a local bait shop or sporting goods store to ask about ice conditions and then check once you get there. The rough guidelines for clear, new solid ice are:

- 2 inches – Stay off
- 4 inches – OK for ice fishing or other activities on foot
- Check the thickness of the ice every 10 to 150 feet.
- Never take any vehicles, snowmobiles or ATVs onto the ice.

### 2. BE SURE IT'S SAFE

- Avoid pressure ridges in the ice and large cracks that can emerge in a lake
- Clear ice is stronger than white ice, which has frozen, thawed and refrozen and is not always stable
- White ice can also be from air bubbles or frozen snow and is much weaker than clear ice. For white ice, double the recommended thickness.

### 3. REMEMBER

No matter your preparation and ice conditions, ice should never be considered 100 percent safe. Be prepared and cautious at all times.

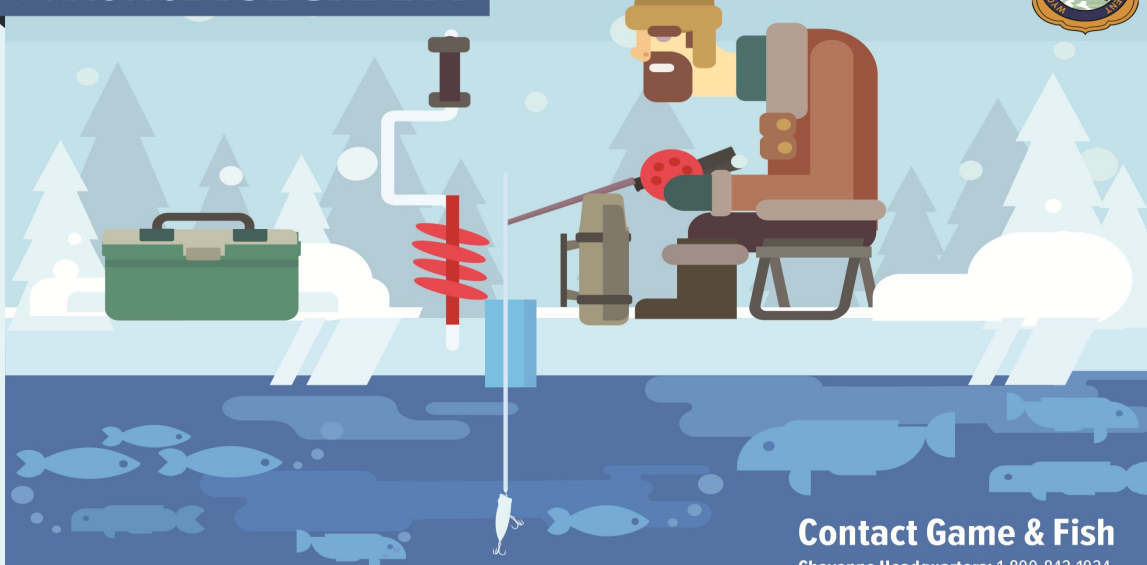
### 4. BUDDY SYSTEM

Anglers should never fish alone. Always fish with someone else and be certain to let a friend know where you are going.

### 5. STAY WARM

To prevent hypothermia if an ice fishing accident does occur, pack an extra set of clothes and hot liquids.

## PRACTICE ICE SAFETY



## What else should I know?

Fluctuating water levels in reservoirs and wind impact ice conditions and can create dangerous ice conditions. Be aware of recent weather conditions and temperatures and scout out the lake you wish to fish for overflow, wet areas, and open water. With variable ice conditions across the state and rapidly changing conditions, anglers are urged to call their regional office to inquire about ice conditions.

Game and Fish discourages driving any motorized vehicle on a frozen lake as well as ice fishing on rivers and or other

moving water that has frozen over. Remember to wear a lifejacket or personal flotation device and carry ice safety picks. Ice cleats are also a good idea. Keep a throw rope handy in case someone falls in.

Anglers venturing on fishing trips this winter should also keep in mind the Fishing Regulations and the Special Winter Ice Fishing provisions, available on the Game and Fish website at [wgfd.wyo.gov](http://wgfd.wyo.gov), regional offices and Cheyenne Headquarters.



### Contact Game & Fish

Cheyenne Headquarters: 1-800-842-1934

Casper Regional Office: 1-800-233-8544

Cody Regional Office: 1-800-654-1178

Green River Regional Office: 1-800-843-8096

Jackson Regional Office: 1-800-423-4113

Lander Regional Office: 1-800-654-7862

Laramie Regional Office: 1-800-843-2352

Pinedale Regional Office: 1-800-452-9107

Sheridan Regional Office: 1-800-331-9834





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## Movin' Moose

Thayne Wildlife Biologist Gary Fralick, Alpine Game Warden Jordan Winter and Afton Game Warden Todd Graham relocated a moose that had taken up residency in the town of Afton. The young bull had been there about a week and it seemed he wasn't going to leave any time soon. The young bull moose had lost a lot of hair due to winter ticks, but otherwise was in fairly good body condition for this time of year. Although the moose was not aggressive, there was concern that it may become that way as is common in late winter. It was decided that everyone would be better off if he were moved away from the urban area. The moose was darted, given a visibility collar and set of ear tags to track his movements and then released at the Alpine elk feedground.



## Elk in the Yard

With assistance from other Jackson Region personnel, wardens Todd Graham and Jordan Winter were able to move elk off of various properties in Star Valley. The elk were co-mingling with cattle and horses. So far, the elk moves have proved fruitful as they were able to get the elk onto the feedground and the nearby forest.





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(Above) An early-season angler releasing a cutthroat he caught on the Snake River. (Below) A pair of cutthroats one Snake River angler had illegally kept during the seasonal closure.



## Early Season Anglers

With the unseasonably warm weather during February and early March, a number of early season anglers have been getting out to wet a line on both the Snake and Salt rivers. Game wardens Kyle Lash and Jordan Winter have been making the rounds visiting with many fishermen and report catch rates being pretty good. One group was even pulling a drift boat out at the Astoria boat ramp. The guide noted it being the earliest he's been able to float the river in his 20 years of guiding.

Warden Lash has found a few anglers who failed to obtain their 2016 fishing license before heading out. Lash also came across one fisherman who was keeping cutthroat he had caught from the Snake River during the annual seasonal closure, which is Nov.1 through March 31.



## New Warden in Town

Meet Jordan Winter, he is a new Game Warden Trainee based out of Alpine. Jordan has hit the ground running, getting out and visiting with a number of hunters and anglers so far in the Jackson Region. Jordan started his Game Fish career in the Sheridan Region as a Wildlife Damage Technician. After six months he was hired as a game warden in the Laramie Region working primarily on the reservoir crew at Glendo before transferring to the Jackson Region in November.







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## Woodrat's Reprieve

Game and Fish offices across the state tend to get a wide variety of animals brought in for various reasons, but Jackson Office Manager Barb Long said this was a first. A resident brought in this furry critter for identification after he had trapped it under his sink. He said it had taken a liking to hamburger buns. So what is it? It's the seldom-seen bushy-tailed woodrat. It is also often called a pack rat for it's affinity of always carrying bits of food or shiny objects in it's mouth, which it then places in piles, sometimes two to three feet high and up to six feet in diameter, near it's hang-outs of rock crevices, under logs or in old vacant buildings.



*Jackson Game Warden Jon Stephens releases a bushy-tailed woodrat that happen to be quite adept, and speedy, at running atop the snow!*

## Living With Large Carnivores

It's that time of year again when bears are waking up and people are preparing to enjoy the great outdoors. Wyoming Game and Fish Department [reminds outdoor enthusiasts to be "bear aware"](#) and attend one of the upcoming public workshops on how to avoid conflicts with large carnivores.

**April 6—Pinedale Library, 6:00-8:00pm**

**May 12—Jackson Library, 5:30-7:30pm**

